

LAWNS OLD AND NEW

WORK FOR THE AUTUMN

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

The War years played havoc with many of the lawns for which our country is famous. The picture of the old cedar of Lebanon gently sighing in the breeze over a luxuriant crop of potatoes or a miniature hayfield will not readily fade from the mind. Many a lawn that had been the playground of generations of children ceased in 1916 to be a lawn, and so far as the grass was concerned had afterwards to begin existence anew on a foundation that as often as not was none the worse for the upheaval.

That an old lawn is necessarily better than a new one is one of those deep-rooted gardening notions that have only a grain of truth in them, and not always that; but where the upkeep of a lawn is an honoured tradition of a place the turf has that indefinable quality that only age can bring, whether on the Downs, the fells, or the cathedral close. Many lawns that look like green velvet from a bedroom window may be found on examination to be infested with moss, daisies, chickweed, clover, plantains, and the hosts of other weeds that defy everything but systematic eradication by man. No matter how carefully it has been tended, once a lawn has been neglected—as, for instance, when a new owner cannot readily be found for an unoccupied place—deterioration begins; but, whatever the original cause, the mischief is increased where there is a neighbouring paddock or field that goes to hay at intervals.

Systematic hand-picking, a monotonous, back-breaking task, is the surest of all ways of killing weeds, because it uproots them; but the lawn sands offered by reputable firms are effective if applied at intervals during the growing season, and preferably not before rain if its coming can be anticipated. On weeds like dandelions and the broader-leaved plantains a general application of lawn sand, however, has little effect, for, though their leaves may disappear, the root remains. A pinch of equal parts of sulphate of ammonia and fine sand on the crown of the plant during a fine spell, repeated after a fortnight, is generally fatal to these pests of lawns, but at this strength the sand and ammonia should be confined to the plant and not dropped about. The removal of broad-leaved weeds leaves a bare patch in the grass, as does the uprooting of dandelions, and a pinch of seed applied to the patch after the weed has gone soon hides the scar.

Before the year is much older lawns should be dressed with a compost made up of good garden soil—as free from stones as possible—mixed with leafmould and passed through a fine sieve. This should be broadcast over a lawn in much the same way as road men broadcast grit over the surface of a slippery road, and then lightly brushed over with a besom. Both soil and leafmould are often loaded with weeds that no one wants on a lawn, and care is needed in the choice of each. The soil can be sterilized, but a simple way of sterilizing leafmould has yet to be found. The smothering of a lawn with a layer of compost does not add to its appearance, but the early winter rains soon alter that. Nothing is gained by dressing lawns with chemical fertilizers at the approach of winter, and the treatment may be left till after the turn of the year. Far more is known now of the effect of chemicals on grass than of old, and the day will doubtless come when rule of thumb will yield to precise methods.

Meanwhile too much stress cannot be laid upon the value of aerating the turf of lawns on heavy soils, and though worms often make a lawn untidy in wet weather, their casts are soon spread with a broom, while every worm hole is a miniature shaft for the access of air to the turf.

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